



## **MRC/AHRC/ESRC ADOLESCENCE, MENTAL HEALTH AND THE DEVELOPING MIND: Call for Research Programmes**

### **Frequently Asked Questions**

#### Remit and scope

##### **Can you describe more what you mean by ‘ambitious’ research?**

This call is not aiming to support research that could be applied for through the standard schemes offered by the funding Councils. Parts of the programme may well be a continuation of current activity; however, it is expected that most elements of any successful programme will be novel, innovative and ambitious. This may also include aspects of high risk-high reward research.

This call is seeking proposals that ‘think bigger’ and are aiming to address impactful research questions and/or challenges through an interdisciplinary and highly collaborative approach. The research that emerges is anticipated to have broad potential for impact, increasing the evidence base that informs policy and practice and contributes to new ways to prevent, identify, treat and manage mental health problems in adolescence and promote wellbeing.

Proposals may apply for up to £4M UKRI contribution. However, it is recognised that research in the scope of this call may vary in costs and that proposals may be ambitious without necessarily applying for the top range of funds available.

##### **Will projects focusing on a specific population (e.g. BAME, with a particular clinical diagnosis or set of symptoms) or age range of adolescence be considered?**

Proposals may address the general adolescent population, or a proposal may wish to focus on one or more vulnerable groups within the adolescent population. Within this call adolescence refers to young people and adults from age 10 to 24. Research may focus across all those ages or on a particular age range within that. Proposals should justify their chosen approach and focus.

##### **The call mentions that a life course approach is in scope, can you elaborate on this?**

Proposals which include research elements focused on individuals younger or older than the defined age range for adolescence (10-24) would be in scope where the primary aim of the research is in line with the objectives of the call e.g. understanding the early life factors that contribute to mental health and wellbeing in adolescence and how later life impacts of issues that emerge at adolescence can be mitigated against, and where the research can be delivered and interpreted within the lifetime of the award (which may require demonstration that a particular longitudinal data set exists to support this).



**The call emphasises asset based and positive framing of approaches, does this mean the studies of mental illness or ill health and causes would not be considered, i.e. only resilience related and positive outcomes?**

One of the key aims of the call is to try and rebalance a typical narrative of mental health and mental illness. The call is trying to balance a preventative and resilience building approach with also focusing on those with manifested disorders or problems. Both are in scope and different proposals may adopt a particular focus along this continuum. Proposals should justify their chosen approach and focus.

**Are you interested in projects that consider the mental health impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic?**

Yes, such programmes would be in scope. COVID-19 is highlighted under the 'Societal Transformation' challenge area within the scope of the published call.

**Would a programme of linked projects covering several areas aligned with the objectives of the call be in scope?**

Programmes of research may include a coordinated and coherent range of studies and inter-related concepts, but these need to be clearly presented as part of a single integrated vision. Proposals will be expected to clearly demonstrate coherence as a whole package of research and justify why this is requiring long-term and extensive support.

**Are evaluations of interventions in scope?**

Yes, where the evaluation is aiming to understand the mechanisms that underpin the effectiveness of the intervention to improve our understanding of what interventions work, for whom and why, and to potentially improve the effectiveness or targeting of the intervention.

**Can methodology research, or infrastructure development, be embedded in a proposal?**

It is acceptable for work packages to include novel methodology research or infrastructure development, as a complement to the overall ambition and to enable the research to be methodologically robust and innovative, but this should not be the main focus of the proposal. This will be the focus of a separate call under this initiative due to be launched in 2021.

**Can interventions be developed and tested/piloted in a programme?**

Yes, however it is expected that prevention or intervention research will be theoretically informed. It is expected that funded research will shed light on the underlying factors that drive change in relation to the outcomes being investigated. Adequately powered proof of concept studies of a new intervention approach are within scope, however it is not anticipated that definitive large-scale intervention trials will be funded as part of this programme.



### **Can innovative dissemination approaches be included in a proposal?**

Yes, where these may improve the reach and potential impact of the research or support the engagement and involvement of key stakeholders and young people.

### **From the remit and scope– can people apply for areas outside the listed challenge areas or do all projects have to be tied to these?**

The challenge areas identified are broad and important areas of focus. If applicants are considering applying with a focus outside of these areas we recommend discussing your ideas with us in advance to ensure they are in the remit of the call.

### **Are you looking to support a balanced portfolio of programmes?**

The scope of the initiative is broad and covers a range of important areas, and this call aims to support high-quality programmes across the portfolio. As such, potential for portfolio balance will be taken into account at shortlisting stage.

We would like to be able to support research that benefits the broadest range of the population, addressing the needs of adolescents across the four nations of the UK and delivering evidence that has long term potential to improve the mental health of young people most in need of support.

### **What level of interdisciplinarity is expected?**

Programmes of work need to be interdisciplinary and the rationale for the inclusion of each discipline should be clearly explained and justified to demonstrate the added value of the interdisciplinary approach for the research question/challenge. Proposals should therefore carefully design and develop the interdisciplinary mix of the programme and avoid tokenism. There is no expectation that each application should include research elements or individual expertise that covers the remits of all three of the main funding Councils unless this aligns with the aims of that proposal. However, it is expected that an ambitious proposal would consist of a mix of collaborating disciplines that reaches beyond the usual remit of a single Research Council.

### **Are the remits of other Research Councils e.g. NERC, EPSRC included?**

We welcome applications that draw in non-traditional disciplines to mental health research or combine disciplines or subdisciplines that have not traditionally collaborated, in order to provide novel insights and approaches. This includes the remits of Research Councils beyond the three main funders. However, it is anticipated that applications will primarily align with the remits of the three main funders (i.e. MRC, ESRC and AHRC).

### **How do the Engagement Awards (funded under this initiative) link with this call?**

The Engagement Awards are aimed at building and strengthening collaborations and exploring novel research directions. Each Award is pursuing an emerging research direction that requires a foundation to be established in terms of collaborations across disciplines and engagement with key stakeholders and young people. It is possible that a research programme proposal under this call may align in scope at a general level to some of the currently funded Engagement Awards, however it is anticipated that proposals to this call for research programmes will have a reasonably established



foundation of networks on which to build research of this scale and duration (though a portion of the programme may well be devoted to widening this network in order to increase the real-world relevance of the research and broaden opportunities for knowledge mobilisation).

Engagement Awards may develop to the point that they could contribute to a broader research programme proposal focused in an aligned area, however this call is not specifically designed to provide follow on funding for these Awards and the areas funded by these Awards are not more or less likely to be funded through the current call.

## Resources

### **Can funding be requested to collect data from existing longitudinal cohorts?**

Yes, using existing longitudinal cohorts to collect data relevant to addressing the research questions posed by the proposal, and where the data would be analysed within the lifetime of the award, would be in scope. Such work however, would also need to meet the requirements noted above in terms of ambition, innovation and novelty.

### **Can proposals include new cohort studies that are not intended to require ongoing long-term funding beyond the lifetime of the award?**

Yes, where these can be shown to deliver impacts within the timeframe of the funding.

### **Is there a minimum budget? Will smaller scale projects be considered?**

There is no minimum budget, however it would be very unlikely for applications of less than £1M to be able to demonstrate the ambition, interdisciplinarity and range of outputs that this call is looking for. This call is not seeking to support small, standalone projects.

## PPI

### **Is it expected to involve young people in the development of the outline proposal?**

Meaningful involvement of young people during the development phase would be welcomed and encouraged. However, we understand the difficulties of doing this at the current time, particularly when looking to work with hard to reach individuals.

We are not expecting applicants to develop new advisory groups or to recruit young people to specifically advise during the proposal development stage, but we would hope that applicants will consider the existing resources and platforms that are already set up and available to bring the views of young people with lived experience to bear on the proposals and questions being developed.

### **If we involve young people in development of the research, should we include costs for their payment in the grant?**

If programmes are asking young people to give up their time and contribute their expertise, then we fully expect that they should be compensated appropriately for their time and effort. Any resultant costs are eligible for inclusion in the proposal.



### **Can the costs of training and developing the young people involved in the research be included in the grant?**

Where training needs are identified for the young people collaborating in the programmes that are aligned with the objectives of the research then these training costs are eligible for inclusion in the proposal.

### **How will plans for co-design/co-production and patient and public involvement more generally be evaluated in the call?**

Collaboration with and involvement of young people should be at the heart of all of the applications. A young person's review panel is built into the review process, and this panel will be specifically looking for creative and meaningful ways of including young people in the delivery of programmes.

#### Eligibility

### **Can an institution lead more than one proposal?**

There are no restrictions on how many applications an individual institution can submit and lead on.

### **Can an applicant be PI on more than one proposal?**

Individuals are only able to submit one application as PI under this call, however an individual may be a PI on one application and a Co-I on another.

### **Can an applicant be Co-I on more than one proposal?**

Individuals may be Co-I on more than one application.

### **Will a submission from single institution, even if they can demonstrate interdisciplinarity, be disadvantaged?**

No. However, it should be clearly demonstrated that the grouping represents an ambitious multidisciplinary collaboration, bringing together excellent researchers with the necessary expertise to address the research challenge. It is expected that applicant teams from a single institution will engage more broadly with non-academic stakeholders, young people and their families – widening the network of collaborators involved in developing the research.

### **Does the PI have to be full-time?**

The PI, or Co-PIs, need to fulfil the [MRC eligibility criteria](#). A Principal Investigator (PI) or Co-Investigator (CoI) must have a contract of employment with the RO for the duration of the grant prior to application, but this does not need to be a full-time contract. By the time the grant starts, the PI must be based in the UK at the eligible RO at which the grant will be administered (the lead organisation). PIs must have a verified joint electronic-submission system (Je-S) account to apply. We will consider proposals for research grants from any researcher who can demonstrate they will direct the proposed research and be actively engaged in carrying it through.



### **Can early careers researchers apply as PI/Co-I?**

We very much encourage Early Career Researchers to be involved in programmes. However, if a more junior researcher is applying to be a PI, then we recommend that they clearly demonstrate in their application that they have the aptitude and skills necessary to lead a programme of this scale and ambition and that they have sufficient support in their wider team of co-investigators (and Co-PI if appropriate) and in the host environment.

### **Is there a limit to the number of Co-Is that can be included on an application?**

No. However there should be clear rationale for the involvement of each Co-I, including how they will assist the PI(s) in leadership and management of the research.

### **Can a lay person be a co-applicant?**

Yes. This may include lived experience researchers, teachers, carers or police for example. To be a co-applicant the individual should have a clear role in the leadership and/or management of the research, if this is not the case individuals may be better included on the application in another way e.g. direct staff, collaborator, consultant, advisory role.

The associated costs of layperson co-applicants will form part of the 30% of total fEC available for funding of non-academic Co-I project contributions.

We would advise the PI to ensure that all layperson Co-I's select 'Private Address' when searching for their organisation and department in Je-S. They also need to select the Je-S Account type that allows their inclusion as an Investigator (PI, Co-I or Res Co-I).

### **For non-academic co-applicants, is there any restriction on number or involvement?**

There is no limit to number, however as above there must be a clear rationale for their inclusion as Co-Is and the role they will play in leadership and management of the research. The combined costs for non-academic Co-Investigators must not exceed 30% of the total 100% fEC of the grant application.

### **Are partnerships with NHS organisations eligible?**

There is no expectation for partnerships with NHS organisations, but as with voluntary sector organisations, such partnership are encouraged. Researchers from NHS bodies are eligible applicants for UKRI funding.

UKRI will pay the standard fEC of NHS organisation costs (usually 80%) so the organisation would be expected to contribute the shortfall. UKRI do not fund NHS support costs or treatment costs. More details can be found here -

<https://www.ukri.org/files/legacy/documents/nhscostsguidance-pdf/> and here <https://www.ukri.org/funding/how-to-apply/eligibility/>.

### **Can programmes involve Co-Is not based in the UK?**

Programmes can include overseas Co-Is if they provide expertise not available in the UK, however applicants should get in touch with UKRI (through [adolescentmentalhealth@mrc.ukri.org](mailto:adolescentmentalhealth@mrc.ukri.org)) to discuss their eligibility for inclusion before



applying. Please see the call document and the MRC funding guide for details on what costs can be included. Overseas investigators cannot lead an application.

**Should the project be implemented only in the UK or can it be conducted internationally, including in Lower and Middle Income Countries?**

It is expected that the outputs of these awards offer a potential route to impact of benefit to young people in the UK. While we are keen for generalisable knowledge, understanding and benefits to other countries, we expect that where evidence-based impacts have the potential to emerge from the research that these should have applicability to the UK. This is not a funding call under the Global Challenges Research Fund at UKRI, therefore it is not specifically aimed at addressing challenges in developing countries.

**If you have a grant being reviewed by the UKRI currently (and are the PI), can you also apply to be a PI on this grant?**

Yes, if the proposals are clearly distinct.

Collaborations

**What types of stakeholders would you particularly like to see involved? How much are commercial partners encouraged?**

We want to see clear evidence of wider engagement and collaboration outside of academia, from the development of the research to a clear plan for this to continue through the program itself. This means we would expect to see relevant stakeholders from policy or from the health or education sectors, charities, or industry for example, as well as those affected by the research, including young people.

**What do you mean by industry? What costs can be requested if industry partners are involved?**

Industry refers to businesses and excludes charities, the third sector or governmental partners. MRC policy does not allow an industry to be included within a proposal as an Investigator. Applicants may request sub-contracted costs to cover specific work they are undertaking e.g. services, products, consultancy. However, where industry is involved in an application as a collaborating partner, and where the collaboration will be governed by a collaboration agreement, the costs for the industry partners involvement will not be eligible to be included on the application. This is to ensure that arrangements are eligible under EU State Aid regulations for MRC funding. Industry partners cannot be both a Project Partner and a sub-contractor.

Please get in touch with us at [adolescentmentalhealth@mrc.ukri.org](mailto:adolescentmentalhealth@mrc.ukri.org) if you have any queries.





### **Would you consider a co-funded project with other funders to extend the work beyond 4 years?**

We would be happy to discuss this with applicants, and other funders, if this is a possibility.

### **Will UKRI be ‘matching’ up interested parties to foster collaborations?**

We are not intending to provide a broad ‘matching’ forum. However, if non-academic organisations, such as charities or other third sector bodies, are keen to engage in this initiative but do not have established academic contacts, then we are happy to share a summary of their interests and experience alongside the details of this call. If you would like your details made available, please email them to [adolescentmentalhealth@mrc.ukri.org](mailto:adolescentmentalhealth@mrc.ukri.org).

### Assessment

#### **Who will be assessing the proposals? And will young people be involved in the process?**

A balanced panel that is able to review and assess a very broad range of applications will be essential. We will seek a panel of UK-based and international experts across a wide range of disciplines as well as representation from key stakeholders, young people and service users. We will seek to recruit a diverse range of young people to contribute to this process and will be working with our newly established Young Persons Advisory Group to develop the process such that their contribution is timely and meaningful.

Full stage proposals will be subject to international peer-review, and applicants will be invited to nominate reviewers as standard. Full proposals will then be assessed by an expert panel (including young people), which will likely involve an interview stage.

#### **Should proposals address COVID-19 in terms of risk analysis and mitigation?**

Awarded programmes are due to commence July 2021 and so it remains unclear at this stage how the COVID-19 pandemic might impact on future research. We recommend that applicants briefly note at outline if their planned research could potentially be significantly affected by the pandemic, e.g. further lockdowns or reduced travel, and how this could be mitigated against. Further detail would be required in the full proposal if shortlisted, at which point future likely scenarios may be clearer.

### Timelines

#### **Could further accommodations be made to the call timeline due to COVID-19?**

The timeline for this call has already been extended by three months at the outline stage to mitigate for the impacts of the pandemic. Given that the pre-call announcement was live from the beginning of the year we do not intend to extend the deadline for outlines beyond September. We are keen to ensure that programmes of research remain timely and are able to commence by July 2021, as such we will continue to work towards the current published timeline for this call, operating virtual panels and interviews as necessary.





This call appears in extraordinary times, and the funders acknowledge with regret that not everyone in our academic community - for example those with caring responsibilities – may now be equally placed to take part in it.

**When will the methodology call be announced and will you be consulting on its scope?**

We are aiming to launch the call early 2021 and will be engaging with the mental health research community to help scope the research opportunities over the coming months.